

Testimony in Support of HB 2400

Presented by: Dr. Alyssa Martin, NDCDE State Director

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Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. For the record, my name is Dr. Alyssa Martin, North Dakota Center for Distance Education's (NDCDE) state director. On behalf of NDCDE, I respectfully submit this testimony in support of SB 2400 with amendments.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 2400, particularly those found on page 4, lines 24–26 and page 6, lines 6–8. These amendments, which we received from Legislative Council just last night, provide access to a \$500 education savings account (ESA) voucher for homeschool students enrolled in courses through the North Dakota Center for Distance Education (NDCDE).

This is an important and positive development. NDCDE serves many homeschool families throughout the state. For some of these students, our diploma program is their only opportunity to earn a diploma from an accredited school. However, at an annual cost of \$2,500, the program can be financially out of reach. Last year alone, 40 families withdrew from the program due to cost. While the \$500 voucher does not cover the full amount, it is a welcome step in helping families with some of the expenses associated with high school completion.

We also recognize that the language on page 6, lines 6–8 clarifies that homeschool students participating in this program are not required to complete state assessments. This is not a change from our current practice. NDCDE has always met these students where they are and holds them to meaningful standards of accountability. We have recently moved to a competency-based education model, which allows us to track student progress by demonstrated mastery rather than time-based metrics—an approach that aligns well with the unique needs of homeschool learners.

In summary, these changes provide a modest but meaningful level of support to homeschool families and help remove some financial barriers to accessing accredited coursework. While our hope was for a voucher that could fully cover the cost of the diploma program, we are grateful for this first step and urge your support of the amendments.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to educational access for all North Dakota students.